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By-Dustin, Richard

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Trained clients were used as the source of reinforcement in simulated counseling interviews of 25 minutes duration. The purpose was to determine if a class of counselor behaviors (counselor understanding) could be made to increase in frequency by verbal reinforcers administered by the trained clients. An own-control design with an ABA three phase paradigm was used in this study. Eleven beginning counselors working and/or attending classes at the University of Minnesota constituted the sample. Ninety-seven taped interviews were obtained for the counselor-subjects in the three phases. Although several methodological questions were answered, no conclusions about the results of this experiment were possible. (PS)

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THE CLIENT AS A SOURCE OF REINFORCEMENT IN THE COUNSELING INTERVIEW

Richard Dustin

This experiment utilized trained clients as the source of reinforcement in simulated counseling interviews of twenty-five minutes. Volunteer undergraduate students were trained to administer preselected reinforcers on a continuous reinforcement schedule.

Every attempt was made to make the counseling life-like and to approximate the situation found in practicum classes. For example, inexperienced counselors were used. In addition, no attempt was made to limit subjects introduced by clients or to impose the same content on all interviews. We had thought about controlling the content in all interviews by using the same memorized stories, but decided to strive for natural, life-like interviews.

Subjects

Subjects used in the study were 11 beginning counselors who worked and/or attended classes at the University of Minnesota during the 1967-1968 school year. Subjects were either volunteers from an office of advisors for undergraduate students or volunteers from a class taught by E.

Nine females and two males were used. The ages of the Ss varied from twenty-two to forty-seven. Two of the Ss had taken a practicum before participating in the experiment. These two Ss were used near the end of the experiment after nine inexperienced Ss had been run. None of the 11 had completed work on their Masters degree at the time of the experiment.

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Design

The central problem of this study was to determine if a class of counselor behaviors could be made to increase in frequency by verbal reinforcers administered by coached clients. An own-control design was utilized in this study with an A B A three phase paradigm.

Operant Level

The OL Phase was to determine the base rate of the designated counselor behavior for each S. Clients in these interviews were uncoached, volunteer students. Each S saw two or three different untrained clients in 25 minute interviews in this phase.

Acquisition

In acquisition, trained clients were introduced. During this phase, the trained clients used one of nine pre-arranged reinforcers each time the counselor emitted the designated behavior. In this phase the same trained client met with counselor subjects once a day for from three to five days.

Extinction

Generally featured in extinction was a duplication of the OL phase. Because of time, I'll just mention that different, volunteer, untrained clients were used. A more complete account is available elsewhere (Dustin 1968).

Reinforcers

Within the self-imposed limits of keeping interviews natural, several short reinforcers were chosen. By using short statements, clients were given flexibility in conducting "normal" interactions without arousing the suspicions of the counselors. However, two longer

reinforcers were included in the list to be used at the discretion of the trained clients. The nine selected reinforcers were

Right
That's right
Very much
Correct
You've got it
Exactly
That's it
You're the first person to. . .
No one else ever. . .

Selected Counselor Response

Probably at no choice point was the plan to approximate "real" counseling more important than the one at which the dependent variable was chosen. It was decided to condition counselor understanding.

The theoretical significance of this behavior seemed secure (Krumboltz 1967; Rogers and Dymond 1954; Tyler 1961). However a precise enough definition for a laboratory experiment was more difficult.

According to the design of this study it was necessary for different people to conceptualize the dependent variable at different stages of the experiment.

1. The author trained clients to recognize and reinforce understanding statements made by counselors within an interview.

2. A counseling psychologist judged that each of the trained clients was ready to engage in the experiment in a criterion interview. Only those clients judged to have correctly reinforced understanding 90 percent of the time by this counseling psychologist and by E in independent tallies were used in the experiment.

3. Clients had to recognize and reinforce the statements during acquisition.

4. Judges were trained to listen to the tape-recorded interviews to determine behavior changes.

These four steps constitute an operational definition. Successful completion of each step could "define" the dependent variable.

Therefore at each of these stages what was meant by "understanding statements" needed to be communicated. Drawing from Brammer and Shostrum (1960) a two part definition was used.

1. Content--When a counselor restates the content or shows he is trying to follow the meaning of the client, it is an understanding statement.

2. Feeling--When a counselor labels a client's feeling or shows he is trying to grasp what the client is feeling, it is an understanding statement.

It will be noted that understanding was treated as a 1--0 situation. Statements were understanding or they weren't. During the experiment the clients made the decision.

Training

Training consisted of three group sessions and individual practice sessions. The training was conducted on an informal basis with as much sharing of personal reactions as possible. Group session one lasted about two hours. Its goals were to introduce trainees to the project and to arrange schedules and subsequent meeting times. The goals of the second training sessions were to form some common understanding of counseling and to teach the students about feelings and understanding as a technique of counseling. Films of interviews and role playing were used in this second session which lasted three hours. In the third session a list of the reinforcers was given after a brief summary lecture of instrumental learning. The final two hours of this three hour session were used practicing being a client and using the reinforcers. In many cases practice sessions additional to the approximately eight hours of training were used. Students

decided when they were ready for the criterion interview.

Results

Ninety-seven taped interviews were obtained for the eleven counselor-subjects in the three phases. These were tallied for number of reinforcers, total number of counselor statements and number of understanding statements. Percentage of understanding statements was plotted across all interviews for each S. The subsequent learning curves would show an increase in percentage of understanding statements in an A B A pattern it was assumed. E rated all 97 interviews and in 10 and 11 cases such curves occured. A common curve pooling all interviews showed much higher percentages in the B phase with little extinction.

However, since E knew which interviews he was rating independent tallies were needed. Three advanced Ph.D students were hired to listen to a sampling of the 97 tapes. The agreement of these judges with E was mixed. Judges agreed that reinforcers were given more frequently in the acquisition phase than in interviews selected from the other two phases. However, varied agreement was achieved with E's percentage of understanding statements. Judge 1 closely agreed with E but Judge 2 did not. Judge 3 disagreed with E on one interview. Based on this inconsistency of the graduate student judges, doubt was indicated concerning the objectivity of E's tabulations. Although several methodological questions had been answered, no conslusions about the results of this experiment were possible.

Discussion

What may have caused this lack of agreement is a subject of speculation. One possible explanation which suggests itself concerns the training of judges. This experiment featured training students to conduct the experiment. The student determined when to reinforce. Although E and a counseling psychologist were able to tap the criteria the trained clients

were using to decide whether to reinforce before the experiment, graduate students apparently couldn't tap the "private" criteria used by the trained clients during the experiment. Future research could use judges who had been trained in a pool with other students. Random drawing from a group trained together could give some the task of serving as trained clients and others the task of judging.

Another explanation is that the graduate students, in their sophistication, insisted on imposing their own ideas about understanding onto the tapes. An interesting example indicates that perhaps the judges were unable to treat understanding as a 1--0 class. In one tape 95 reinforcers were tallied. As mentioned, the judges agreed quite highly with E's tallied of S^r. In addition, it had been determined that 90 per cent of the reinforcers were being correctly given in the criterion interview. Assuming a similar percentage in the tape in question, it seems about 95 reinforcers were really given, yet Judge 3 tallied five understanding statements. To overcome this discrepancy, graduate student judges could be given a simple five point scale from no understanding (1) to complete understanding (5). Then as the judges tally their levels of understanding, E could use all tallied above the first level, no understanding as understanding.

A final and perhaps most important explanation would be conducting the ratings during the interviews. Judges need to record on a stereo tape a signal that will then show whether the same statements that are being reinforced are the ones which are being judged. Some of the "guesswork" of what the judges and E were tallying would be removed if judges could mark on a tape that also contained the reinforcers. This should lead to the heart of the difficulties of specifying precise definitions for complex behaviors which are central to understanding the relation of instrumental learning to counselor education.

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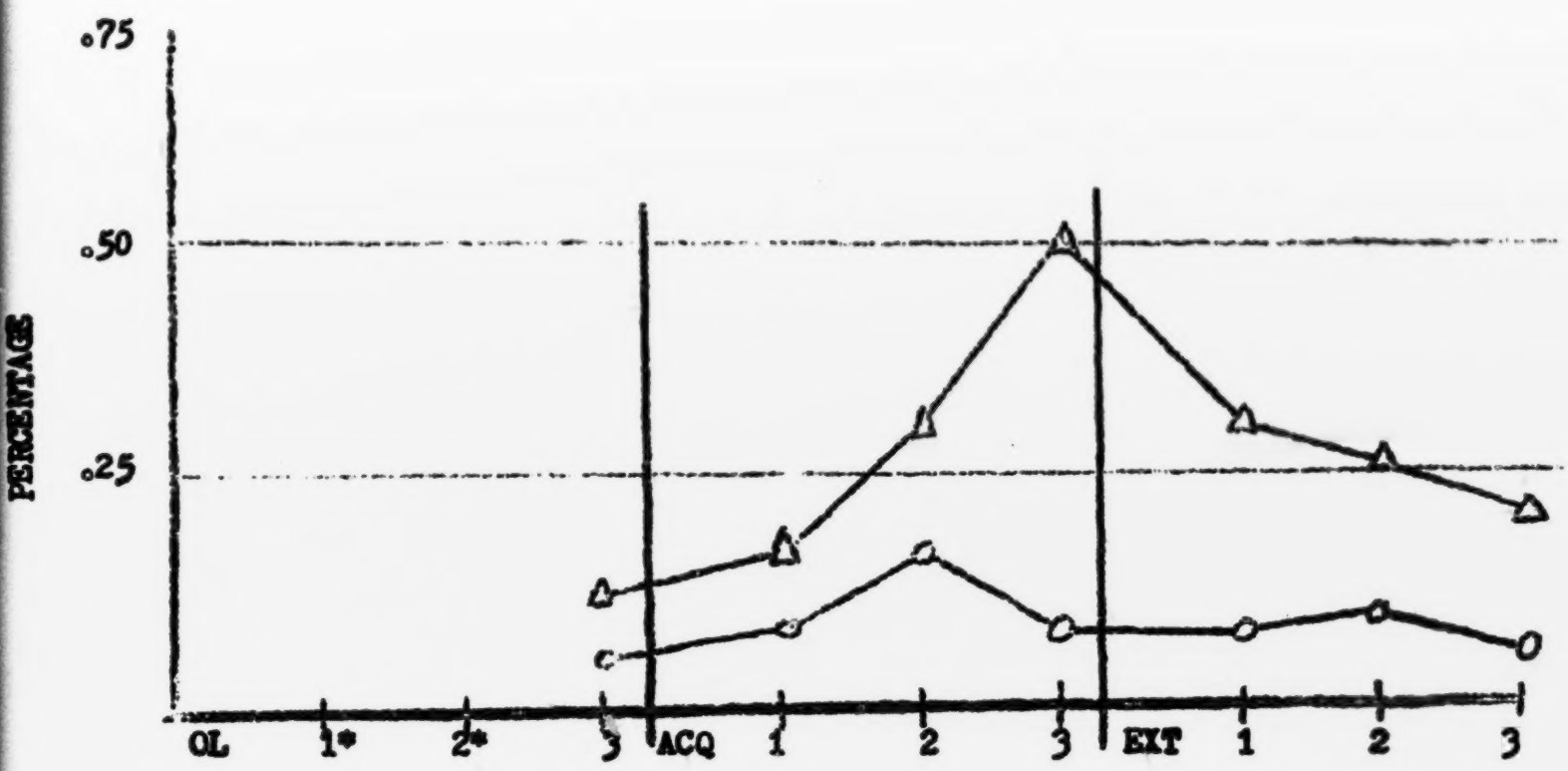
PERCENTAGE OF UNDERSTANDING

STATEMENTS FOR ONE S



* No Recording Available

Δ E's Ratings

○ J3's Ratings

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J1

ERCENTAGE OF UNDERSTANDING STATEMENTS

lected Interviews	E	J1
1	.48	.47
2	.20	.14
3	.35	.25
4	.33	.30
5	.17	.09
6	.09	.07

J2

PERCENTAGE OF UNDERSTANDING STATEMENTS

Selected Interviews	E	J2
1	.35	.28
2	.49	.28
3	.29	.16
4	.32	.28
5	.12	.17
6	.07	.21

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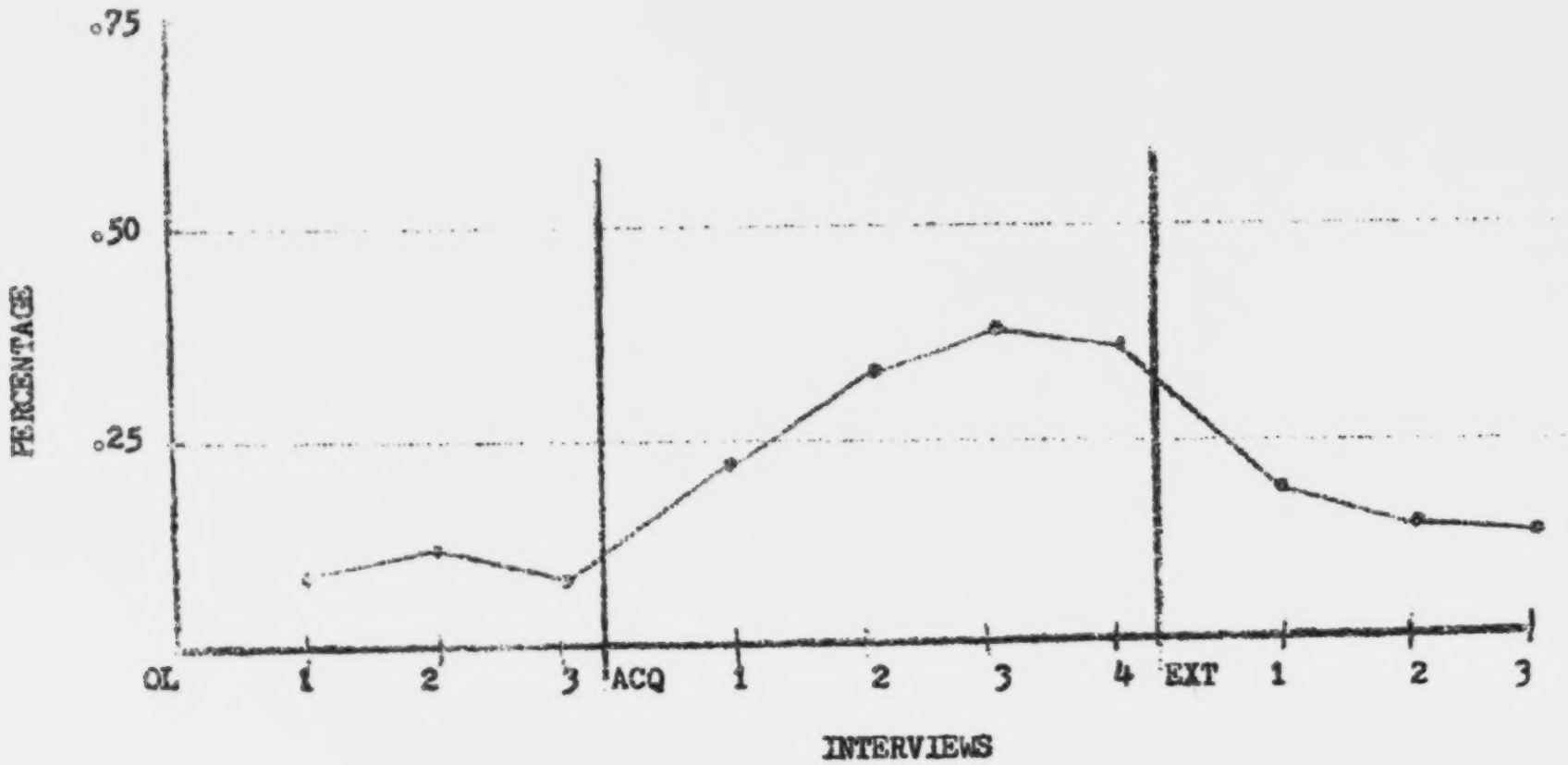
PERCENTAGE OF UNDERSTANDING

STATEMENTS FOR ALL Ss



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